

Character Builder 您好嗎？

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 Qing Dynasty

旗

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kei4*

Meanings: flag, banner, standard, pennant, Manchurian

旗 (radical 方 *fang1*, square) means 旗幟 (*qi2 zhi4* = flag-iconic-cloth-strip = flag/banner/pennant): 國旗 (*guo2 qi2* = national-flag), 軍旗 (*jün1 qi2* = army-flag), 旗手 (*qi2 shou3* = flag-hand = standard-bearer), 旗艦店 (*qi2 jian4 dian4* = flag-ship-shop). 旗鼓相當 (*qi2 gu3 xiang1 dang1* = flags-drums-match-equal) describes equally strong camps/sides.

滿人 (*Man3 ren2* = Manchurian people) were divided into 八旗 (*ba1 qi2* = eight-banners, military-administrative units): two 紅旗 (*hong2 qi2* = red-banners), two blue/yellow/white, hence called 旗人 (*qi2 ren2* = banner-people/men/women).

Bannermen 結辮 (*jie2 bian1* = knot-queue = wear long queue/pigtail), bannerwomen wore 旗袍 (*qi2 pao2* = Manchurian-gown). Manchurian nobility kept 騎射 (*qi2 she4* = horse-riding/ horsemanship-archery) tradition, used 包衣 (*bao1 yi1* = domestic slaves).

by Diana Yue