

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 migrant workers

窮

Putonghua pronunciation: *qiong2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kung4*

Meanings: poor, poverty, dead-end

窮 = 貧 (*pin2*) = poor/poverty. 貧民窟 (*pin2 min2 ku1* = poor-people's-caves) = slums. 窮巷 (*qiong2 xiang4* = dead-end-alley) = cul-de-sac. 窮省 (*qiong2 sheng3* = poor-provinces) need state's 救濟 (*jiu4 ji4* = save-irrigate = material/financial aid).

In Hongkong 窮人 (*qiong2 ren2* = poor-people) claim 綜援 (*zong1 yuan2* = Comprehensive Social Security Assistance). Many 失業者 (*shi1 ye4 zhe3* = lost-employment-persons = unemployed people) 人窮志不窮 (*ren2 qiong2 zhi4 bu4 qiong2* = person-poor~courage-not~poor = materially-deprived but keeping up courage/spirit).

To eliminate 貧富懸殊 (*pin2 fu4 xuan2 shu1* = poor~rich~hang/stretch~difference = big gap between rich and poor), 創富 (*chuang4 fu4* = creating-wealth) is better than 均貧 (*jun1 pin2* = equal/average~poor = evenly sharing/spreading burden of poverty).

by Diana Yue