

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 hawkers

檔

Putonghua pronunciation: *dang* 4

Cantonese pronunciation: *dong* 2

Meanings: shelf, archive, stall, level

檔 (radical 木 *mu* 4, wood) means wooden shelf: 檔案 (*dang* 4 *an* 4 = shelf-table = files/archives), 存檔 (*cun* 2 *dang* 4 = keeping-files).

檔 also means wooden stand. 大牌檔 (*da* 4 *pai* 2 *dang* 4 = Cantonese *daai* 6 *paai* 4 *dong* 2 = big-plaque-stalls) = cooked food stalls. Wet markets have 雞檔 (*ji* 1 *dang* 4 = chicken-stalls), 菜檔 (*cai* 4 *dang* 4 = vegetable-stalls). 賭檔 (*du* 3 *dang* 4 = gambling-stalls), 大檔 (*da* 4 *dang* 4 = Cantonese *daai* 6 *dong* 2) are illegal gambling dens.

高檔貨 (*gao* 1 *dang* 4 *huo* 4 = high-shelf-goods) = high-end goods, 低檔貨 (*di* 1 *dang* 4 *huo* 4 = low-shelf-goods) = low-end goods. 開檔 (*kai* 1 *dang* 4 = open-stall) means opening shop or start a business. 收檔 (*shou* 1 *dang* 4 = close-stall) means closing shop or telling somebody to “Go to hell!”

by Diana Yue