

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 the Third World



Putonghua pronunciation: *pin 2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *pan 4*

Meanings: poverty-stricken, lack

貧 = 貧窮 (*pin qiong 22* = poor-exhaust = poor). Third World countries are 發展中國家 (*fa zhan zhong guo jia 13121* = develop-stretch-ing-country-home = developing countries). Some are 窮國 (*qiong guo 22* = poor-countries) with 貧乏 (*pin fa 22* = poor-lacking = inadequate) resources.

貧富不均 (*pin fu bu jun 2421* = poor-rich-not-even = uneven distribution of wealth) creates social problems, but 均貧 (*jun pin 12* = even-poor = flat poverty for everyone) is no solution.

貧血 (*pin xue 24* = inadequate-blood) = anaemic/anaemia. 貧困 (*pin kun 24* = poverty-confined) people/societies are pitiable, but 長貧難顧 (*chang pin nan gu 2224* = long-poverty-difficult-to-care-for = it is difficult/unrealistic to forever support/aid those perpetually in need).