

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.

This week: Words about swindlers

Pronunciation: *tou* (Putonghua, 1st tone), *tau* (Cantonese, 1st tone)
Basic meaning: steal

偷 = steal. 偷偷地 (*tou tou di* = steal-steal-ly) = stealthily/secretly: 偷看 (*tou kan* = stealthily/secretly-watch/read), 偷聽 (*tou ting* = stealthily/secretly-listen to), 偷吃 (*tou chi* = steal-eat = take/steal and eat something without permission).

Lazybones 偷懶 (*tou lan* = steal-lazy = skip work). Sprinters sometimes 偷步 (*tou bu* = steal-step = jump the gun). Guerrillas 偷襲 (*tou xi* = steal-attack = ambush) enemies. Illegal immigrants 偷渡 (*tou du* = steal-across-borders). 偷情 (*tou qing* = steal-emotion/love = 偷歡 *tou huan* = steal-joy/pleasure) describes men secretly meeting mistresses.

小偷 (*xiao tou* = small/petty~thieves) commit 偷竊 (*tou qie* = steal-steal = theft). Cantonese expression 偷呢拐騙 (*tou e guai pian* = steal-cheat~kidnap~con) summarizes swindler's bag of tricks.

by Diana Yue