

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 gangsters



Putonghua pronunciation: *bang1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bong1*

Meanings: help, band, group, gang, clique

幫 (radical 巾 *jin1*, kerchief/bandage) means幫助 (*bang1 zhu4* = bind~help) = 幫忙 (*bang1 mang2* = help~busy) = help/aid/assist. 幫手 (*bang1 shou3* = help~hand) = help/helper.

幫派 (*bang1 pai4* = gang~faction) = closely/selfishly-bound group: 上海幫 (*Shang1 Hai3 bang1* = faction representing Shanghainese interests). Powerful 幫會 (*bang1 hui4* = gang~society = underworld societies) influence businesses/politics. Early PRC media called Jiang Jieshi/Chiang Kai-shek-led KMT “蔣幫” (*Jiang3/Chiang3 bang1* = Chiang Clique). 四人幫 (*si4 ren2 bang1* = four~persons~gang = Gang of Four) was crushed in 1976.

黑幫 (*hei1 bang1* = criminal~gangs), 匪幫 (*fei3 bang1* = bandit~gangs) run 黃 (*huang2*, yellow = prostitution), 賭 (*du3*, gambling), 毒 (*du2*, poison = drug-trafficking) rackets. 幫兇 (*bang1 xiong1* = help~violence) = abet/abettor.

by Diana Yue