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 political parties

Putonghua pronunciation: dang3
Cantonese pronunciation: dong2
Meanings: party, faction, gang, clique

黨 = 黨派 (dang3 pai4 = party-faction). Comrades 結黨 (jie2 dang3 = tie/form-party), absorb 黨員 (dang3 yuen2 = party-members). 保皇黨 (bao3 huang2 dang3 = protect-king/emperor-party = loyalists) denounce 叛黨 (pan4 dang3 = rebel-gang = rebels).

In China, 國民黨 (guo2 min2 dang3 = state-people-party = Nationalist Party) was 執政黨 (zhi2 zheng4 dang3 = hold-rule-party = ruling party), but 黨派林立 (dang3 pai4 lin2 li4 = party-faction-forest-stand = had many rivaling factions), launched 清黨 (qing1 dang3 = clean-up-party = party purge). 共產黨 (gong4 chan2 dang3 = common/share-property-party = Communist Party) took over in 1949.

黑手黨 (hei1 shou3 dang3 = black-hand-party) means the Mafia. 黃牛黨 (huang2 niu2 dang3 = yellow-ox-party) means touting gang.

by Diana Yue