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 England

Putonghua pronunciation: ba4
Cantonese pronunciation: ba3
Meanings: bully, appropriate, hegemony

Britain/UK, situated on 英倫三島 (ying1 lun2 san1 dao3 = “England”-transliterated-three-islands = the British Isles), had powerful 海軍 (hai3 jun1 = sea-army = naval fleet), led Europe’s 工業革命 (gong4 ye4 ge2 ming4 = work-industry-change-life = industrial revolution).

19th-century Britain 船堅炮利 (chuan2 jian1 pao4 li4 = ships-strong-canons-sharp = had powerful/advanced navy), established many 海外殖民地 (hai3 wai4 zhi2 min2 di4 = sea-beyond-plant-people-land = overseas colonies). 維多利亞女王 (wei2 duo1 li4 ya3 nu3 wang2 = “Victoria”-transliterated- female-king = Queen Victoria)’s 大英帝國 (da4 ying1 di4 guo2 = big-England-emperor-state = British Empire) was 世界霸權 (shi4 jie4 ba4 quan2 = world-boundary-bully-power = world hegemony).

霸道 (ba4 dao4 = bully’s-way) describes bullies/gangsters/hegemonic powers.

by Diana Yue