Character Builder

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 austerity measures

崩

Putonghua pronunciation: beng1
Cantonese pronunciation: bang1
Meanings: collapse, demise, rupture, split apart, crumble

Pictogram 崩 shows 山 (shan1, hill/mountain) crashing down on everything: 山崩地裂 (shan1 beng1 di4 lie4 = mountains- collapse-earth-rupture = geological shake-up), 崩堤 (beng1 di1 = collapse-of-dam). Houses 崩塌 (beng1 ta1 = collapse) in landslip. 駕崩 (jia4 beng1 = royal-chariot-collapse) = death of king/emperor.

Gynecology term 血崩 (xue3 beng1 = blood-collapse) means vaginal haemorrhage, metrorrhagia. 崩牙 (beng1 ya2 = collapse-tooth = tooth/teeth shown to be missing from mouth), 崩鼻 (beng1 bi2 = collapsed/broken-nose) are facetious Cantonese descriptions.

Non-productive country 坐食山崩 (zuo4 shi2 shan1 beng1 = sit-eat-mountain-collapse = exhausts all resources/savings).

Austerity measures following 崩盘 (beng1 pan2 = collapse-of-market-trading-prices = stock market crash) make everyone 精神崩潰 (jing1 shen2 beng1 kui4 = essence-spirit-collapse-break = get mental breakdown).

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