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 \ 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 corruption

（radical氵 = water shui3 = water）

Putonghua pronunciation: xi3

Cantonese pronunciation: sai2

Meanings: wash, launder

洗 = wash: 洗臉 (xi2 lian3 = wash-face), 洗衣 (xi3 yi1 = wash-clothes), 洗淨 (xi3 jing4 = wash-clean). Robbers 洗劫 (xi3 jie4 = wash-rob = rob clean) bank. Acquitted person 洗脱罪名 (xi3 tuo4 zui4 ming2 = wash-off-sin/guilt-name = is cleared of charges).

Penitent thief 洗手不幹 (xi2 shou3 bu4 gan4 = wash-hands-no-do = determinedly discontinues illegal/disreputable activities), 洗心革面 (xi3 xin1 ge2 mian4 = wash-heart-change-face = repents, reforms behavior).

黑社會 (hei1 she4 hui4 = black-society-club = triad societies) use 賭場 (du2 chang3 = gamble-field = casinos) to 洗錢 (xi3 qian2 = wash-money = launder money). WWII Japanese invaders 血洗南京 (xue3 xi3 nan2 jing1 = blood-wash-south-capital = committed huge bloodshed/killings in Nanjing).

by Diana Yue