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 **nouveau-riche**

![暴](Image)

**Putonghua pronunciation:** bao4  
**Cantonese pronunciation:** bo6  
**Meanings:** sudden, abrupt, violent, cruel, short-tempered, injure


暴君 (bao4 jün1 = cruel-king/tyrant)’s 暴政 (bao4 zheng4 = cruel-regime), 暴行 (bao4 xing2 = cruel-acts/deeds) trigger 暴動 (bao4 dong4 = violent-move = riots). 暴飲暴食 (bao4 yin3 bao4 shi2 = over-eating-over-drinking) cause 暴肥 (bao4 fei2 = rapidly-growing-fat). Anorexic patient 暴瘦 (bao4 shou4 = rapidly-grows-thin), then 暴卒 (bao4 zu2 = suddenly-dies).

Speculator bets on stock-market’s 暴升 (bao4 sheng1 = sudden/sharp-rise), 暴跌 (bao4 die1 = sudden/sharp-fall). Gaining 暴利 (bao4 li4 = huge-profit) makes him 暴發 (bao4 fa1 = sudden-develop/boost = become rich overnight).

by Diana Yue