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*

**富**

Putonghua pronunciation: **fu4**
Cantonese pronunciation: **foo3**
Meanings: rich, wealthy, wealth

Pictogram 富 shows roof over bulging house, means 富有 (fu4 you3 = rich-have = wealthy). 富翁 (fu4 weng1 = rich-old-man) means wealthy man/person.

Parents 勤儉致富 (qin2 jian4 zhi4 fu4 = diligence-frugality-achieve-rich = amassed fortune through hard work and saving). However, 富二代 (fu4 er4 dai4 = rich-two/second-generation = sons/daughters of rich people) 炫富 (xuan2 fu4 = flaunt-their-wealth), kindling 仇富心態 (chou2 fu4 xin1 tai4 = hate-rich-heart-attitude = hate rich people mentality) in public.

Eurozone’s 富裕 (fu4 yu4 = wealthy-plentiful = rich) countries lecture 超支 (chao1 zhi1 = surpass-expenditure = over-spent) countries: 富起來 (fu4 qi3 lai2 = rich-rise-come = accumulating wealth) takes years; 喊窮 (han3 qiong2 = yell-poor = wailing about being poor) doesn’t help.

by Diana Yue