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.

This week: Words about pirates

Criminals 盜竊 (dao qie = rob-steal). Lawless places are 盜賊如毛 (dao zei ru mao = robbers-thieves-are-like-hairs = full of thugs). Bonnie and Clyde are 大盜 (da dao = big-robbers). 盜版 (dao ban = robber-edition) CD/DVD are pirated editions.

海盗 (hai dao = sea-robbers = pirates) 劫船 (jie chuan = rob-ships), hold 人質 (ren zhi = person-abductee = hostages). 戰艦 (zhan lan = war-battleships = warships) 圍剿 (wei jiao = surround/contain-pursue-attack) until pirates 投降 (tou xiang = turn-to-surrender = surrender).

Fools 掩耳盗鈴 (yan er dao ling = cover-ears-while-stealing-bell = commit obvious offences thinking no one notices). 盜亦有道 (dao yi you dao = robbers-also-have-rules/morals = are fair/just/kind) describes men like Robin Hood.

Pronunciation: dao (Putonghua, 4th tone), do (Cantonese, 6th tone)
Basic meaning: steal, rob, robber

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