

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 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 corruption

洗

(radical 冫 = 水 *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 洗脫罪名 (*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).