

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 shopping malls

牌

Putonghua pronunciation: *pai2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *paai4*

Meanings: sign, label, brand

牌 are stiff rectangles showing information/authorization: 門牌 (*men2 pai2* = door~plate), 路牌 (*lu4 pai2* = road~sign), 車牌 (*che1 pai2* = vehicle-license or car-plate), 紙牌 (*zhi3 pai2* = paper-card = playing-cards).

Shops display 招牌 (*zhao1 pai2* = wave/attract~board = signboards). Consumers compare different 牌子 (*pai2 zi0* = label-diminutive = brands), boycott 冒牌貨 (*mao4 pai2 huo4* = pretend~brand~commodity = faked/pirated goods).

Manufacturers use 宣傳 (*xuan1 chuan2* = broadcast~send = propaganda) to promote 品牌 (*pin3 pai2* = class-label = quality brands), award prizes to 金牌推銷員 (*jin1 pai2 tui1 xiao1 yuan2* = gold~medal-push~sale~member = top salesmen).

Brilliant marketing transforms 老牌 (*lao3 pai2* = old-sign = old labels/brands) into 名牌 (*ming2 pai2* = name/famous~plate = famous brand-names).

by Diana Yue