

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 territorial disputes

Putonghua pronunciation: *quán2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kuen4*

Meanings: right, authority, power

Ideogram 權 shows 木 (mu4, wooden scales), ++ (= 草 *cao3*, grasses/masses), double 口 (*kou3*, people's mouths) and 佳 (*jie1*, good), thus signifies “popularly-weighted/approved power”.

Government 掌權 (*zhang3 quán2* = palm~power = holds/ controls power), exercises 權力 (*quán2 lì4* = power~strength = power), asserts 權威 (*quán2 wei1* = power~grandeur = authority). Citizens have 權利 (*quán2 lì4* = power~advantage = rights) but also 義務 (*yi4 wu4* = integrity/unpaid-duty = obligations). Activists propagate 民權 (*min2 quán2* = people~rights = civil rights), 維權 (*wei2 quán2* = protect~rights = protection of civil rights).

Country has 主權 (*zhu3 quán2* = lord~power = sovereignty), 治權 (*zhi4 quán2* = governing~power) over territory. Air-force ensures 制空權 (*zhi4 kong1 quán2* = control~air/sky~power = air supremacy) over enemy.

by Diana Yue