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 Los Angeles

Putonghua pronunciation: chuan2
Cantonese pronunciation: chuen4
Meanings: transfer, transmit, deliver, convey, spread, teach, impart to

傳 (radical 亻 = ren2, person/people) = spread (verb intransitive/transitive). Bees 傳送 (chuan2 song4 = spread~ transfer) pollen. News 傳開 (chuan2 kai1 = spread~out). Great portraits傳神 (chuan2 shen2 = transmit/convey-spirit) are vivid/life-like.

傳人 (chuan2 ren2 = transfer-person) = heir. 傳播學 (chuan2 bo4 xue2 = spread-broadcast-study) = communication studies. Messenger 傳遞 (chuan2 di4 = pass-handover = delivers) message.

傳教 (chuan2 jiao4 = spread/preach-religion) = evangelize.

European Catholic 傳教士 (chuan2 jiao4 shi4 = spread-religion-scholars = missionaries) established差會 (chai1 hui4 = send-messenger-society = missions) in 加利福尼亞州 (jia1 li4 fu1 ni2 ya3 = “California”-transliterated-state), e.g. 洛杉磯 (luo4 san1 ji1 = "Los Angeles"-transliterated), literally “City of 天使 (tian1 shi4 = heavenly-messengers = angels)”. 

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