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 warlords

Putonghua pronunciation: jü4
Cantonese pronunciation: gui3
Meanings: depend, occupy, seize, appropriate

據 = dependence/basis. 証據 (zheng4 jü4 = proof-basis) = evidence. 據聞 (jü4 wen2 = depend-hear) = according to hearsay, 據說 (jü4 shuo1 = depend-say) = allegedly. 票據 (piao4 jü4 = ticket-basis/proof) = bills/receipts etc.

Warlords 佔據 (zhan4 jü4 = appropriate-occupy = take over) others’ territories/properties, 據為己有 (jü4 wei2 ji3 you3 = took-as-self-own = appropriate them). In chess/warfare, indecisive side 進退失據 (jin4 tui4 shi1 jü4 = advance-retreat-lose-dependence/basis = makes inconsistent moves).

In ROC-PRC Civil War, national government 據有 (jü4 you3 = possess-has = held) most resources. Chinese Communists established 據點 (jü4 dian3 = occupation-points/bases), used 延安 (Yan2 An1 = Yan’an) as 革命根據地 (ge2 ming4 gen1 jü4 di4 = change-fate-root-dependence/basis-land = revolutionary base).

by Diana Yue