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 residency

Putonghua pronunciation: jü1
Cantonese pronunciation: gui1
Meanings: house, residence, domicile, abode, reside, dwell, occupy

Ideogram 居 (尸 shi1, unmoving body + 古 gu3, ancient = always stationed) means 居住 (jü1 zhu4 = occupy-reside). 居民 (jü1 min2 = residing-people) = residents. 隱居 (yin3 jü1 = vanish-reside) = live as hermit.

居所 (jü1 suo3 = residing-place) = dwelling/domicle. 居無定所 (jü1 wu2 ding4 suo3 = reside-no-stable-place) describes homeless or unpredictable traveler. 公民 (gong1 min2 = pubkuc/civil-person = citizens) have 居留權 (jü1 liu2 qüan2 = live-stay-right = right of abode).

When applying for 居港權 (jü1 Gang3 qüan2 = reside-in-Hongkong-right = residency in Hongkong), remember 長安不易居 (Chang2 An1 bu4 yi4 jü1 = Chang-An-no-easy-to-live): Hongkong, like big metropolis Chang-an (i.e. today's 西安, Xi1 An1), is expensive, not easily affordable!

by Diana Yue