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 promotion

権

Putonghua pronunciation: qüan2
Cantonese pronunciation: kuen4
Meanings: right, power, authority, to weigh

Character 權 = 木 (mu4, wood/scales-rod) + 艹 (cao3, grass/masses) + 口 (kou3, mouth) + 佳 (jia1, good), suggests democratically-endorsed power. Rulers have 權力 (qüan2 li4 = power-strength = power). Individuals have 權利 (qüan2 li4 = powers-benefits = rights), 權益 (qüan2 yi1 = powers-advantages = privileges), 人權 (ren2 qüan2 = human-rights).

権分立 (san1 qüan2 fen1 li4 = three-powers-separately-stand) means mutual independence of executive power, legislative power, judicial power.

Nobility/clerics have 權威 (qüan2 wei1 = power-might = authority). Commoners 無權無勇 (wu2 qüan2 wu2 yong3 = no-power-no-bravery = are neither powerful nor strong/daring), can’t fight authorities who 以權謀私 (yi3 qüan2 mou2 si1 = use-power-plot-self = use official power to plot for private gains).

by Diana Yue