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

權
Putonghua pronunciation: qūan2
Cantonese pronunciation: kuen4
Meanings: power, authority, right

權 (radical 木 mu4, wood/tree) means 權力 (qūan2 li4 = power-strength) possessed by 權貴 (qūan2 guì4 = powerful-nobility/privileged). 維權 (wei2 qūan2 = defend-right) means 維護人權 (wei2 hu4 ren2 qūan2 = defend-protect-human-rights). 權威 (qūan2 wei1 = power-force) means ruler/scholar’s authority. 版權 (ban3 qūan2 = publish-version-right) = copyright.

Generalissimo holds 軍權 (jūn1 qūan2 = military-power), 位高權重 (wei4 gào1 qūan2 zhòng4 = rank-high-power-weighty = has high position and power). Reformists advocate 分權 (fèn1 qūan2 = sharing-power). Rebels plan 奪權 (duò2 qūan2 = snatching/seizing-power).

People granted 居留權 (jū1 liú2 qūan2 = living-staying-right = right of abode/residency) enjoy related 權利 (qūan2 li4 = power-benefit = rights) but have 義務 (yì4 wù4 = obliged-duty) to pay taxes.

by Diana Yue