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 capital cities**

**都**
Putonghua pronunciation: *du1*
Cantonese pronunciation: *do1*
Meanings: capital


Old-fashioned term 京城 (jing1 cheng2 = capital-city) means 首都 (shou3 du1 = first-city = capital). Ming Dynasty 定都 (ding4 du1 = decided/chose-national-capital = established capital in) 南京 (Nan2 Jing1 = Nanjing/Nanking), 遷都 (qian1 du1 = moved-capital to) 北京 (Bei3 Jing1 = Beijing/Peking). 京剧 (jing1 ju2 = capital-drama) = Beijing opera.

京都 (Jing1 Du1 = capital-city) is Japanese kanji for Kyoto. 東京 (Dong1 Jing1 = eastern-capital) is kanji for Tokyo.

by Diana Yue