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 photographers

Putonghua pronunciation: jing3
Cantonese pronunciation: ging2
Meanings: scene, view, vista

景 (radical 日 ri4, sun) = 景色 (jing3 se1 = scene-color = pleasant view/vista). 景物 (jing3 wu4 = scene-objects) = natural/man-made objects in view. 背景 (bei4 jing3 = back-view) = backdrop/background. Landscape-photographer 取景 (qū2 jing3 = take/pick-view = select angles, take shots).

攝影沙龍 (she4 ying3 sha1 long2 = absorb-shadow-“salon”-transliterated = photography exhibition) displays 人像 (ren2 xiang4 = people-image = portraits), 風景 (fēng1 jìng3 = wind/custom-view = landscapes). Set-designer makes 佈景 (bù4 jìng3 = arrange-scene = sets).

Metaphorically, 景 means situation. Up-swing market is 好景 (hào3 jìng3 = good-view = doing well). 前景 (qián2 jìng3 = front-view) = projection. Oldies fear 晚景凄涼 (wǎn3 jìng3 qī1 liáng2 = evening-view-sad-cold = poverty-stricken, destitute old age).

by Diana Yue