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 New York

股
Putonghua pronunciation: gu3
Cantonese pronunciation: goo2
Meaning: top-leg, part, share, stocks and shares

股 (radical 月 = 肉 rou4, flesh/meat) means part/share. Company 上市 (shang4 shi4 = up/onto-market = goes public), issues 股份 (gu3 fen4 = part-share = shares). Shares are bought/sold on 股票市場 (gu3 piao4 shi4 chang3 = stock/share-certificate-market-place), i.e. 股市 (gu3 shi = stock market).

Shareholders hold shares in form of 股票 (gu3 piao4 = stock-ticket = 證券 zheng4 juan4 = proof-ticket = stock/share certificates), e.g. 一萬股藍籌 (yi1 wan4 gu3 lan2 chou2 = 10,000-shares-blue-chips).

股票經紀 (gu3 piao4 jing1 ji3 = stock-brokers) frequent New York's 證券交易所 (zheng4 juan4 jiao1 yi4 suo3 = stock-certificate-cross-exchange-office = stock exchange), i.e. NYSE on 華爾街 (hua2 er3 jie1 = “Wall”-transliterated-street = Wall Street).

by Diana Yue