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 hope

Putonghua pronunciation: wang4
Cantonese pronunciation: mong6
Meaning: view, look, hope, expectation, prospect

望 (radical 月 yue4, moon) = look/view/see. 远望 (yuan3 wang4 = distant-look) = look far. 望無際 (yi1 wang4 wu2 jie4 = one-look/view-no-edge = endless) desert, traveler 望見 (wang4 jian4 = looks-and-sees) mirage.

Derivatively, 望 means 希望 (xi1 wang4 = wish-look/see = hope), 欲望 (yu4 wang4 = desire-hope = desire/yearning). Great 期望 (qi2 wang4 = period/longing-look = expectations) often end in 失望 (shi1 wang4 = lose-hope = disappointment). Employee 升職有望 (sheng1 zhi2 you3 wang4 = rise-job/post-has-hope/prospect = sees promotion in sight), 喜出望外 (xi3 chu1 wang4 wai4 = gladness-exceed-hope-beyond = is happy beyond expectation).

Christians preach 信望愛 (xin4 wang4 ai4 = faith-hope-love), 願望 (yuan4 wang4 = willing-hope = wish for) world peace.

by Diana Yue