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:

1\textsuperscript{st} tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2\textsuperscript{nd} tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3\textsuperscript{rd} tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4\textsuperscript{th} 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 old family money

\begin{itemize}
  \item Putonghua pronunciation: \textit{chuan2}
  \item Cantonese pronunciation: \textit{chuen4}
  \item Meanings: send, transmit, pass on, bestow, circulate, spread
\end{itemize}

傳 (\textit{chuan2} = send, bestow) means bestow-send. King 傳位 (\textit{chuan2 wei4} = bestows/throne) to heir. Court 傳召 (\textit{chuan2 chao4} = sends-summons) witness. Epics describe 傳說 (\textit{chuan2 shuo1} = circulated-talk = stories/legends).

Teacher 傳授 (\textit{chuan2 shou4} = passes-on-teaches) knowledge/skills. Media 傳播 (\textit{chuan2 bo4} = transmit-broadcast) news. 傳真 (\textit{chuan2 zhen1} = transmit-true/real) = facsimile/fax. 訛傳 (\textit{e2 chuan2} = false-circulate) = rumors.

Distinguished family 詩禮傳家 (\textit{shi1 li3 chuan2 jia1} = poetry-rites-pass-on-family = keeps scholastic/refined family tradition). Descendants遺傳 (\textit{yi2 chuan2} = leave-behind-pass-on = inherit) family traits. 傳家寶 (\textit{chuan2 jia1 bao3} = passed-on-family-treasure) = heirloom. In song/poetry, 龍的傳人 (\textit{long2 de0 chuan2 ren2} = dragon-'s-pass-on-person = dragon's heirs/descendants) means the Chinese race.

by Diana Yue