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

厚
Putonghua pronunciation: hou4
Cantonese pronunciation: hau5
Meaning: thick, thickness, rich, heavy, generous, respectful

厚 (radical 厂 han3, hills/stones) means 厚實 (hou4 shi2 = thick-solid), 厚牆 (hou4 qiang2 = thick-walls), 厚皮 (hou4 pi2 = thick-skin/hide), 厚齶 (hou4 jian3 = thick-calusses) on guitarist's hands, 醴厚 (chun2 hou4 = matured-rich) flavor of wine. 厚重 (hou4 zhong4 = solid-heavy) describes considerate/steady/reliable person's character/style.

Entrepreneur has 豐厚 (feng1 hou4 = rich-massive) fortune, 厚待 (hou4 dai4 = generously/kindly-treats) employees, 厚臉皮 (hou4 lian3 pi2 = thick-face's skin = cheeky/shameless) official takes briber's 厚禮 (hou4 li3 = expensive-presents).

Teacher likes 厚道 (hou4 dao4 = kind-way = kind/considerate/forgiving) disciple, 寄以厚望 (ji4 yi3 hou4 wang4 = rest-with-thick-hope = puts high hopes on him). 忠厚 (zhong1 hou4 = loyal-kind/considerate/honest) person appreciates benefactor's 厚愛 (hou4 ai4 = generous-love/kindness).

by Diana Yue