Character Builder

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 bank accounts

户
Putonghua pronunciation: hu4
Cantonese pronunciation: woo6
Meaning: door or window panel, household

Pictogram 户 means window/door panel or household: 門戶 (men2 hu4 = door-panels/do), 戶外 (hu4 wai4 = doors-out = outdoors), 住户 (zhu4 hu4 = residential-household), 商戶 (shang1 hu4 = commercial-unit).

Migrant acquires 户籍 (hu4 ji2 = residence-registration), 安家落户 (an1 jia1 luo4 hu4 = place-family-descend-household = settles family), becomes 一戶 (yi1 hu4 = one-household) of city's 千門萬戶 (qian1 men2 wan4 hu4 = thousand-doors-ten-thousand-households = large population).

Bank’s 客戶 (ke4 hu4 = guest-household = customer) has 往來戶口 (wang3 lai2 hu4 kou3 = go-come-account-mouth = current account), 儲蓄戶口 (chu3 xu4 hu4 kou3 = savings-account). 大戶 (da4 hu4 = big-customer) forgets 休眠賬戶 (xu1 mian2 zhang4 hu4 = rest-sleep-accounts-household = dormant accounts).

by Diana Yue