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 Chief Executive Election

政
Putonghua pronunciation: zheng4
Cantonese pronunciation: jing3
Meanings: rule, administration, governance

政 means rule/regime. In 君主政制 (jün1 zhu3 zheng4 zhi4 = monach-rule-political-system = monarchy), king heads 政權 (zheng4 qüan2 = rule-power/authority = regime/administration). People praise 仁政 (ren2 zheng4 = benevolent-rule). 暴政 (bao4 zheng4 = despotic-rule) causes 政變 (zheng4 bian4 = rule-change = coup d’état).

政治 (zheng4 zhi4 = administration-rule) = politics. 政客 (zheng4 ke4 = political-guest) = political activists. 政治家 (zheng4 zhi4 jia1 = politics-rule-master = politicians) publishes 政論 (zheng4 lun4 = political-commentaries). 政綱 (zheng4 gang1 = political-principles/program).

政府 (zheng4 fu3 = rule-house = government) implements 政策 (zheng4 ce4 = political-plan/strategy = policies). Sage says: 為政不在多言 (wei2 zheng4 bu4 zai4 duo1 yan2 = administering governance doesn’t need too much talking).

by Diana Yue