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 territorial disputes

権
Putonghua pronunciation: qüan2
Cantonese pronunciation: kuen4
Meanings: right, authority, power

Ideogram 権 shows 木 (mu4, wooden scales), + + (= 草 cao3, grasses/masses), double 口 (kou3, people’s mouths) and 佳 (jie1, good), thus signifies “popularly-weighted/approved power”.

Government 掌權 (zhang3 qüan2 = palm-power = holds/controls power), exercises 權力 (qüan2 li4 = power-strength = power), asserts 權威 (qüan2 wei1 = power-grandeur = authority).
Citizens have 權利 (qüan2 li4 = power-advantage = rights) but also 義務 (yi4 wu4 = integrity/unpaid-duty = obligations).
Activists propagate 民權 (min2 qüan2 = people-rights = civil rights), 維權 (wei2 qüan2 = protect-rights = protection of civil rights).

Country has 主權 (zhu3 qüan2 = lord-power = sovereignty), 治權 (zhi4 qüan2 = governing-power) over territory. Air-force ensures 制空權 (zhi4 kong1 qüan2 = control-air/sky-power = air supremacy) over enemy.

by Diana Yue