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 the Tibetan people

Putonghua pronunciation: chong2
Cantonese pronunciation: sung4
Meaning: lofty, high, elevate, admire, revere, advocate, worship

崇 (radical 山 shan1, mountain) = high/elevate: 崇高 (chong2 gao1 = lofty-high) ideals, 崇敬 (chong2 jing4 = adore-revere) leader. Tibet has 崇山峻嶺 (chong2 shan1 jün4 ling3 = high-mountains-steep-ranges). Lamas 地位尊崇 (di4 wei4 zhung1 chong2 = place-position-supreme-high = have supreme status). Christians 崇奉 (chong2 feng4 = worship-serve) Jesus, 推崇 (ti1 chong2 = recommend-praise) his teachings. Priest leads 主日崇拜 (zhu3 ri4 chong2 bai4 = lord’s-day-ador-worship = Sunday worship/service).

Youngsters 崇尚 (chong2 shang4 = admire-prefer) trendy lifestyle, 崇拜 (chong2 bai4 = adore-worship) trend-setters. Pragmatist 崇實 (chong2 shi2 = advocates-practical/realtistic attitude), criticizes 崇洋 (chong2 yang2 = adore-ocean/foreign = worship of foreign people/values), 英雄崇拜 (ying1 xiong2 chong2 bai4 = fine-male/strong-ador-worship = hero worship).

by Diana Yue