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.

This week: Words about borrowing

還 Pronunciation: huan (Putonghua, 2nd tone), waan (Cantonese 4th tone)
Basic meaning: return, repay

Adverb 還 (hai) = also. Verb 還 (huan) = return. 還原 (huan yuan = return-original) = back to original state. 還手 (huan shou = return-hand) = hit/fight back. 衣錦還鄉 (yi jin huan xiang = wear-brocade-return-home-region) means home-coming of one who has made fortunes elsewhere.


有債不還 (you zhai bu huan = has-debts-no-payback) means default payment. Companies without 償能 (chang huan neng li = repay-return-ability-power), i.e. insolvent, have to declare bankruptcy.

by Diana Yue