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 rejuvenation

Putonghua pronunciation: chong2, zhong4
Cantonese pronunciation: chung4, jung6
Meaning: again, repeat, double, many, layer, From, since, heavy, serious, important

重 (千 qian1, thousand + 里 li3, Chinese mile) indicates man walking long distance. 重 (zhong4) means 重要 (zhong4 yao4 = main/serious-important). 重 (chong2) means repeat: 重逢 (chong2 feng2 = again-meet), 重建 (chong2 jian4 = re-build), 重组 (chong2 zu3 = re-organize), 重生 (chong2 sheng1 = again-born = rebirth).

Failed student 重考 (chong2 kao3 = again-takes-exams), 重见天日 (chong2 jian4 tian1 ri4 = again-see-sky-sun) describes blindman regaining eyesight or prisoner 重获自由 (chong2 huo2 zhi4 you2 = again-obtain-self-let = freed).

Tough loser 重來不哭 (chong2 lai2 bu4 ku1 = since-all-along-no-cry = never cries), 重新 (chong2 xin2 = again-new = again) assesses situation, 捲土重來 (juan2 tu3 chong2 lai2 = roll-land-again-come = makes comeback).

by Diana Yue