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

猛 (meng3)
Cantonese pronunciation: maang5
Meaning: fierce, strong, forceful, powerful, violent, sudden

猛 (meng3) means fierce/brave: 猛獁 (meng3 shou4 = fierce-beast), 猛禽 (meng3 qin2 = fierce-bird), 猛烈 (meng3 lie4 = powerful-violent). 猛將 (meng3 jiang4 = fierce-general = fierce/brave/mighty warrior) has 威猛 (wei1 meng3 = heroic/macho-powerful) image.


Lazy student 猛然悔悟 (meng3 ran2 hui4 wu4 = suddenly-ly-regrets-understands = is suddenly enlightened), studies hard, grades 突飛猛進 (tu4 fei1 meng3 jin4 = suddenly-fly-powerful-advance = show rapid, spectacular improvement).

by Diana Yue