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 Han people

Putonghua pronunciation: rong2
Cantonese pronunciation: yung4
Meaning: mix, melt, dissolve, merge, blend, flow, pleasant

融 (radical 虫 = 蟲 chong2, worm/bug) means 融和 (rong2 he2 = warm-harmonious/pleasant). 圓融 (yuan2 rong2 = round/smooth-receptive) person can 通融 (tong1 rong2 = through-melt = contain/tolerate) others. Couple in 融洽 (rong2 qia4 = warm-harmonious) relationship feel 其樂融融 (qi2 le4 rong2 rong2 = its-joy-warm-warm = warmth, enjoyment, happiness).

Economist watches 金融市場 (jin1 rong2 shi4 chang3 = gold/money-current-market-place = financial market)'s 融資 (rong2 zhi1 = merge-capital = financing) activities, 融會貫通 (rong2 hui4 guan4 tong1 = melt-understand-through-pass = links facts/points, understands thoroughly).

Buddhism and Han/Chinese-culture 融合 (rong2 he2 = mix-merge), 融入 (rong2 ru4 = blend-into) Chinese society.
Misunderstandings 消融 (xia1 rong2 = shrink-melt = melt away) like glaciers 融化 (rong2 hua4 = melting-dissolving).

by Diana Yue