

Character Builder 您好嗎？

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 1949 Liberation

放

Putonghua pronunciation: *fang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fong3*

Meanings: free, release, send out, let loose

放 = 放手 (*fang4 shou3* = release~hand/control = let go): 放下 (*fang4 xia4* = put-down) burden, 放棄 (*fang4 qi4* = let-go-drop = give up), 放羊 (*fang4 yang2* = let-loose/tend~sheep/goats), 放火 (*fang4 huo3* = release~fire = commit arson).

Playboy 放縱 (*fang4 zong4* = release~let-loose = indulges himself). Rape victim screams: “放開我!” (*fang4 kai1 wo3* = let~free~I = Let me go!) After kidnappers 放人 (*fang4 ren2* = release~person/hostage), everyone 放心 (*fang4 xin1* = put-down~heart = feels relieved).

Decades after 解放 (*jie3 fang4* = untie~free = Liberation), China 開放門戶 (*kai1 fang4 men2 hu4* = open~ajar~door~panels = lifts restrictions), 放眼世界 (*fang4 yan3 shi4 jie4* = cast-eyes~world-territory = casts eyes/vision on the whole wide world).