

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 migrant workers



Putonghua pronunciation: *hui2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *woo4*

Meanings: return

回來 (*hui2 lai2* = return-come) means coming back, 回去 (*hui2 qu4* = return-go) means going back. 來回票 (*lai2 hui2 piao4* = come-go-ticket) = return ticket.

浪子回頭 (*lang4 zi3 hui2 tou2* = wayward-son-turn-back-head) describes Prodigal Son's return. 回歸熱 (*hui2 gui1 re4* = return-return-heat/fever) means overseas Chinese's fervor of visiting/re-settling in Motherland or immersing in Motherland's culture.

In China, massive 春運 (*chun1 yun4* = spring-transport = Spring Festival travel season) begins before Chinese New Year. Migrant workers/students take trains/buses 回家 (*hui2 jia1* = return-home) 過年 (*guo4 nian2* = pass-year = spend the New Year). 回鄉證 (*hui2 xiang1 zheng4*, return-home-village~ document = 回鄉卡 *hui2 xiang1 ka3*, return-home-village~card = Home Return Permit) allows Hongkong/Macao residents to enter Mainland.

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