

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 migrants' home-coming

春

Putonghua pronunciation: *chun1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chun1*

Meanings: spring

春天 (*chun1 tian1* = spring-sky/days) = 春季 (*chun1 ji4* = spring season/quarter).

過新年 (*guo4 xin1 nian2* = pass~new~year) means celebrating 新春 (*xin1 chun1* = new~spring = New Year season). Chinese 農曆 (*nong2 li4* = farmer's~almanac = lunar calendar) celebrates 除夕 (*chu2 xi1* = minus~evening = New Year's Eve), 春節 (*chun1 jie2* = spring-festival = first days of First Lunar Month), 元宵 (*yuan2 xiao1* = first-night = fifteenth day of First Lunar Month, Lantern Festival).

In springtime, 萬象更新 (*wan4 xiang4 geng1 xin1* = ten-thousand-images~change~new = the world is refreshed/ regenerated).

Teenage girls 思春 (*si1 chun1* = think/want~spring = fancy romance). 貓兒叫春 (*mao1 er2 jiao4 chun1* = cat~diminutive~call~spring = cats on heat make springtime mating cries).

by Diana Yue