

# 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 migrants' home-coming

運

Putonghua pronunciation: *yun4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wan6*

Meanings: transport, work, activate

運 means summoning strength to transport/work. Planets 運行 (*yun4 xing2* = move-walk = move/turn/revolve). Organizations 運作 (*yun4 zuo4* = move-work = operate). Gymnasts 做運動 (*zuo4 yun4 dong4* = do-activate-move = workout). Activists join 學運 (*xue2 yun4* = students' movement), 工運 (*gong1 yun4* = workers' movement).

China's 春運 (*chun1 yun4* = spring-movement) means massive movement of 農民工 (*nong2 min2 gong1* = farm-people-worker = migrant laborers from rural areas) taking 春節 (*chun1 jie2* = Spring Festival) holidays to go home.

This year 公共運輸 (*gong1 gong4 yun4 shu1* = public-common-transport-convey = public transportation) supplied 客運 (*ke4 yun4* = visitors/travelers-transport), 貨運 (*huo3 uim4* = goods-transport = baggage transport) for over 二億 (*er4 yi1* = two-hundred-million = 0.2 billion) migrants.

by Diana Yue