

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



Putonghua pronunciation: *hui2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wooi4*

Meanings: return

回 = return/comeback: 回來 (*hui2 lai2* = return~come = come back), 回去 (*hui2 qu4* = return~go = go back), 回家 (*hui2 jia1* = return~home). Hongkong's 回歸 (*hui2 gui1* = return~come-home) means her return to China in 1997.

China's 農民工 (*nong2 min2 gong1* = farm~people~worker = migrant laborers from rural areas) 回鄉 (*hui2 xiang1* = return~to~home~village/town) to spend lunar New Year. Buying 來回票 (*lai2 hui2 piao4* = come~go~ticket = return tickets) means they will not 一去不回 (*yi1 qu4 bu4 hui2* = one~go~no~return = go away for good).

When weather 回暖 (*hui2 nuan3* = return~warm = becomes warm again), we laugh: “春回大地!” (*chun1 hui2 da4 di4* = spring~returns~big~land = “It’s spring again!”)