

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

鄉

Putonghua pronunciation: *xiang1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *heung1*

Meanings: rural, village

鄉 means countryside/land: 鄉村 (*xiang1 cun1* = rural~village), 鄉下 (*xiang1 xia4* = rural~down = countryside), 下鄉 (*xia4 xiang1* = down~rural = go to the countryside), 鄉下人 (*xiang1 xia4 ren2* = rural~in~person = villager), 夢鄉 (*meng4 xiang1* = dream~land).

Migrants return to 家鄉 (*jia1 xiang1* = home~village = native town/village) to spend New Year, meet 家人 (*jia1 ren2* = family~people/members), 鄉親 (*xiang1 qin1* = village's~close-relatives/friends), hear 鄉音 (*xiang1 yin1* = village~sound = native accents), forget 鄉愁 (*xiang1 chou2* = native-town/village~sadness = nostalgia for home).

鄉鎮企業 (*xiang1 zhen4 qi3 ye4* = village~small-town~establish-profession = enterprises in small villages/towns) can improve economy of 窮鄉僻壤 (*qiong2 xiang1 pi4 rang3* = poverty~village~remote~land = impoverished far-out regions).

by Diana Yue