

# 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 PRC's 60<sup>th</sup> year

改

Putonghua pronunciation: *gai 3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *goi 2*

Meanings: alter, change

改 = 改動 (*gai dong 34* = alter~move/change). Seamstresses 改衣 (*gai yi 31* = do alterations). Developers 改建 (*gai jian 34* = change~build = re-build) old premises, 改善 (*gai shan 34* = change~good/better = improve) facilities. Car-makers 改裝 (*gai zhuang 31* = change~furnish = re~model/convert) sedans into race-cars. Fickle witnesses/partners 改口 (*gai kou 23* = change~mouth = change testimony/promises).

勞動改造 (*lao dong gai zao 2434* = labor~move~change~make) means making dissidents work in factories/farms to correct/reform their thinking/life-style. Penitents 改過 (*gai guo 34* = change~wrongdoing = recant/overcome mistakes/weaknesses).

改頭換面 (*gai tou huan mian 3244* = change~head~replace~face) describes individuals changing look/identity, organizations changing structure. 改朝換代 (*gai chao huan dai 3244* = change~reign~replace~generation) is regime change.