

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 PRC's 60th year

放

Putonghua pronunciation: *fang 4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fong 3*

Meanings: drop, open, bloom, relax, release

放 means 放下 (*fang xia 44* = put-down), 放棄 (*fang qi 44* = forsake/abandon). Shepherds 放羊 (*fang yang 42* = release sheep/goats to graze). “放心!” (*fang xin 41* = drop/relax-heart) means “Put yourself at ease!”

Playboys lead 放縱 (*fang zong 44* = free-indulgent = excessive) lifestyles. “易放難收!” (*yi fang nan shou 4421* = easy-to-expand-difficult-to-contract/shrink) is a wise comment on over-stretched investments/spending/commitments.

Dissidents who spoke up in 1956's “鳴放運動” (*ming fang yun dong 2444* = birds-sing-flowers-bloom~movement) were later 下放 (*xia fang 44* = down-release = banished). Now, 改革開放 (*gai ge kai fang 3214* = alter~change~open~release = reforms and opening-up) policy fosters 開放 (*kai fang 14* = open-minded~outgoing) attitude.

by Diana Yue