

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 operas

(radical 口 *kou3* = mouth)

Putonghua pronunciation: *chang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *cheung3*

Meanings: sing

唱 = 唱歌 (*chang4 ge1* = sing~songs). 歌唱家 (*ge1 chang4 jia1* = song~sing~master = vocalist) 獨唱 (*du2 chang4* = alone~sing = sings solo). Unaccompanied 合唱團 (*he2 chang4 tuan2* = combine~sing~group = choir/chorus) performs 清唱 (*qing1 chang4* = pure~sing = a cappella).

Chinese term “唱戲” (*chang4 xi4* = sing~drama) means opera-singing using various 唱腔 (*chang4 qiang1* = singing~styles).

Serenader 唱情歌 (*chang4 qing2 ge1* = sings~love~songs).

Pop-group releases 唱片 (*chang4 pian4* = sing~piece = records/CDs).

唱片騎師 (*chang4 pian4 qi2 shi1* =

sing~piece~ride~master = disc jockey) works in 的士高 (*di1 shi4 gao1* = “disco”-transliterated). Talk of RMB appreciating 高唱入

雲 (*gao1 chang4 ri4 yun2* = high~sing~into~clouds = is soaring/getting real hot).