

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

劇

Putonghua pronunciation: *ju4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kek6*

Meanings: drama

劇 = 戲劇 (*xi4 ju2* = play/act~drama). 百老匯 (*bai2 lao3 hui4* = “Broadway”-transliterated) stages 歌舞劇 (*ge1 wu3 ju2* = sing-dance~drama = musicals). TV runs 肥皂劇 (*fei2 zao4 ju2* = fat~soap~drama = soap operas).

China has many 地方戲 (*di4 fang1 xi4* = land-area~drama = regional operas). Hong Kong has 粵劇 (*yue4 ju2* = Cantonese~drama = Cantonese opera), 粵曲 (*yue4 qu3* = Cantonese~song = classical-style Cantonese songs) tradition.

西洋歌劇 (*xi1 yang2 ge1 ju2* = west-ocean~song~drama) means western opera. 劇情 (*ju2 qing2* = drama~emotion/event = plot) involves 愛 (*ai4*, love), 恨 (*hen4*, hate). Verdi's Aida is 悲劇 (*bei1 ju2* = sorrow~drama = tragedy). Mozart's Marriage of Figaro is 喜劇 (*xi3 ju2* = happy~drama = comedy).