

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 Los Angeles

Putonghua pronunciation: *ying3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ying2*

Meanings: shadow, reflection, movie

影 (radical 彡 *shan1*, woolly/floral frilling) = 影子 (*ying3 zi0* = shadow~diminutive): 人影 (*ren2 ying3* = person's~shadow/silhouette), 倒影 (*dao3 ying3* = reversed~shadow = reflection).

導演 (*dao3 yan3* = guide~act = directors) shoot 電影 (*dian4 ying3* = electric~shadows = 影片 *ying3 pian4* = shadows~piece = films/movies) in 片場 (*pian4 chang3* = film/movie-field = film studios). 荷里活 (*he2 li3 huo2* = 好萊塢 *hao3 lai2 wu1* = “Hollywood”-transliterated) is 夢工廠 (*meng4 gong1 cang3* = dream~work~factory = dream factory).

影星 (*ying3 xing1* = movie~stars), 迪士尼動畫 (*di2 shi2 ni2 dong4 hua4* = “Disney”-transliterated~animation~films/cartoons), 奧斯卡獎 (*ao4 si1 ka1 jiang3* = “Oscar”-transliterated~awards) glamorize US's 軟實力 (*ruan3 shi2 li4* = soft~solid~strength = soft power).