

# 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 operas

角

Putonghua pronunciation: *jue2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gok3*

Meanings: horn, corner (*jiao3*), compete, role, part (*jue2*)

角色 (*jue2 se1* = role-color) = acting role/part. Play/movie/opera 導演 (*dao2 yan3* = direct-act = director) picks 演員 (*yan3 yuan2* = act-member = actors/actresses) to play 主角 (*zhu3 jue2* = major/lead-actor/actress), 配角 (*pei4 jue2* = minor/accompanying-actor/actress). Olivier, Chaplin are 名角 (*ming2 jue2* = famous-actors).

In Chinese opera, 生 (*sheng1*, young male role), 旦 (*dan4*, young/old female role), 丑 (*chou3*, clown role), 淨 (*jing4*, middle-/old-age male role) have different 唱腔 (*chang4 qiang1* = singing styles), 做手 (*zuo4 shou3* = do/act-hand = hand gestures), 身段 (*shen1 duan4* = body-section = body language).

人生如戲 (*ren2 sheng1 ru2 xi4* = human-life-resemble-drama = "All the world's a stage"). Most people play 小角色 (*xiao2 jue2 se1* = little-role-color = insignificant roles).

by Diana Yue