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 waltzes

Putonghua pronunciation: yūan2
Cantonese pronunciation: yuen4
Meanings: round, circle, circumference, satisfactory, fulfill, fulfilled

Ideogram 圓 shows 圓圈 (yūan2 qūan3 = round-circle) enclosing something. 圓形 (yūan2 xíng2 = circle-shape) has 圓周 (yūan2 zhou1 = circle-rim = circumference). 圓規 (yūan2 gui1 = circle-regulate) = pair of compasses.

圓 means verb/adjective 圓滿 (yūan2 man3 = round-full = complete/fulfilled). Bride and groom 圓房 (yūan2 fāng2 = complete-room = had first sexual intercourse as man and wife). Idealist 圓夢 (yūan2 mèng4 = filfills-his-dream). Liar 圓謊 (yūan2 huāng3 = complete-lie = patches up his lie). Monk 圓寂 (yūan2 jì4 = complete-silence = dies/enters nirvana).

The waltz, transliterated as "華爾滋" (hua2 er3 zīl) and translated as "圓舞曲" (yūan2 wǔ3 qu3 = round-dance-melody), came from 維也納 (wei2 ye3 na4 = "Vi-en-na"-transliterated.)

by Diana Yue