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 pipe organs

巨 (jù4)
Cantonese pronunciation: gui6
Meanings: huge, gigantic, giant, large amount

巨 (originally meaning ruler) means huge/gigantic: 巨型 (jù4 xìng2= gigantic-size), 巨石 (jù4 shí2 = huge-boulder), 巨響 (jù4 xiāng3 = loud/great-sound). Fairytale features 巨人 (jù4 rén2 = giants), 巨龍 (jù4 lóng2 = huge-dragon).

Muralist paints 巨作 (jù4 zuò2 = huge-work) depicting battle-scene 巨細無遺 (jù4 xì4 wù2 yì2 = large-small-no-omit = in full detail). Undergoing post-war 巨變 (jù4 biàn4 = huge-changes/calamities), country budgets 巨資 (jù4 zī1 = huge-capital) to launch 艱巨 (jiān1 jù4 = difficult/strenuous-big) reconstruction projects.

管風琴 (guǎn3 fēng1 qín2 = pipe-organ) is 巨大 (jù4 dà4 = huge-grand) instrument housed in 大教堂 (dà4 jiāo1 táng2 = big-religion-hall = cathedral). J. S. Bach is 巨匠 (jù4 jiāng4 = great master) of organ music.

by Diana Yue