

# 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.

## This week: Words about music

戲

Pronunciation: *xi* (Putonghua, 4<sup>th</sup> tone), *hei* (Cantonese 3<sup>rd</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: drama, opera

戲 = 戲劇 (*xi ju*) = drama. 歌劇 (*ge ju* = songs-drama) means western operas, e.g. “阿伊達” (*a i da* = “Aida” transliterated).

Chinese operas are 戲曲 (*xi qu* = drama-songs), and performing them is called 唱戲 (*chang xi* = sing-drama), emphasizing the singing. Major branches include 崑劇 (*Kun ju* = Kunshan-opera), 京劇 (*jing ju* = Beijing opera), 川劇 (*Chuan ju* = Sichuan opera). Opera roles are classified into 生 (*sheng*, young male), 旦 (*dan*, young female), 丑 (*chou*, clown), 淨 (*jing*, personality).

戲子 (*xi zhi* = drama-persons) are professional opera-singers. 票友 (*piao you* = ticket/amateur-friend) are amateurs. 人生如戲 (*ren sheng ru xi* = man-life-like-drama/opera) echoes Shakespeare's line “All the world's a stage”.

by Diana Yue