

# 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 banquets

宴

Pronunciation: *yan* (Putonghua, 4<sup>th</sup> tone), *yin* (Cantonese 3<sup>rd</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: banquet, formal meal, throw a banquet

宴 = 宴會 (*yan hui* = banquet~meeting) = banquet.  
國宴 (*guo yan*) = state banquet. 家宴 (*jia yan*) = family banquet. 設宴 (*she yan* = arrange~banquet) means playing host and throwing a dinner party.  
婚宴 (*hun yan*) = wedding banquet. 公宴 (*gong yan* = colleagues/office~banquet) means a company dinner, not a private dinner. Winning teams hold 慶功宴 (*qing gong yan* = celebrate~success~banquets). Buddhist followers hold 齋宴 (*zhai yan* = vegetarian~banquets = dinners without meat dishes). 羅漢請觀音 (*luo han qing guan yin* = Lohans~treat~Guanyin) means friends jointly invite a single guest to dinner.  
鴻門宴 (*hong men yan* = Hong~Gate~banquet) is a banquet given in honor of a guest with a conspiracy to arrest/kill him.

by Diana Yue