

# 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**

# 東

Pronunciation: *dong* (Putonghua, 1<sup>st</sup> tone), *dung* (Cantonese 1<sup>st</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: east, host

東方 (*dong fang* = east~side) = the East/Orient. 東洋 (*dong yang* = east~ocean) means Japan. 東南亞 (*dong nan ya* = east~south~asia) = southeast Asia.

Traditionally, the host family occupied the east wing of the family residence, and guests occupied the west wing. Thus, 東家 (*dong jia* = east~family) means employer. 做東 (*zuo dong* = act~east) means playing host, paying for the expenses.

東方紅 (*dong fang hong*) = The East is Red, a songs-and-dances-performance glorifying China. 西風東漸 (*xi feng dong jian* = west~wind~east~gradual) means western practices are coming to the East. Mao's statement 東風壓倒西風 (*dong feng ya dao xi feng* = east~wind~press~fall~west~wind) means the East will eventually overtake the West in progress.

by Diana Yue