

# 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

琴

Pronunciation: *qin* (Putonghua, 2<sup>nd</sup> tone), *kam* (Cantonese 4<sup>th</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: stringed or piped musical instrument

Traditionally, connoisseurship in 琴, 棋 (*qi* = 圍棋 *wei qi* = Go), 書 (*shu* = calligraphy), 畫 (*hua* = painting) symbolize good upbringing.

“Qualifier + 琴” denote various musical instruments: 古琴 (*gu qin* = ancient~琴, seven-stringed zither); 鋼琴 (*gang qin* = steel~琴 = piano); 小提琴 (*xiao ti qin* = small~pickup~琴 = violin); 胡琴 (*hu qin* = 琴 from Hu, region northwest of China, stringed instrument played with bow). The Tibetan 六弦琴 (*liu xian qin* = six~strings~琴) is strummed like the 吉他 (*ji ta* = “guitar” transliterated).

琴譜 (*qin pu*) means 琴 notation scores. 對牛彈琴 (*dui niu tan qin* = facing~bull/cow~strum~琴) means casting pearls before swine.

by Diana Yue