

# 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 bureaucrats

清

Pronunciation: *qing* (Putonghua, 1<sup>st</sup> tone), *ching* (Cantonese, 1<sup>st</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: clear, pure, clean, innocent

清 = 清潔 (*qing jie* = clear~clean/clean-up). Morning air is 清新 (*qing xin* = clean-new = fresh). We see/think 清楚 (*qing chu* = clear~clear = clearly) when 清醒 (*qing xing* = clear~awake = sober). Messy rooms need 清理 (*qing li* = clean-up~arrange = tidying).

Virtuous/high-minded people are 清高 (*qing gao* = clean/pure~high). 清官 (*qing guan* = clean~officials) means uncorrupt officials, but 清官難審家庭事 (*qing guan nan shen jia ting shi* = clean~official~difficult~adjudicate~family~courtyard~affairs = even unbiased judicial opinion cannot clarify/pacify family arguments/ quarrels).

Accused of lying/corruption/treachery, we plead “清者自清!” (*qing zhe zi qing* = “Clean/innocent~person~remain-naturally~clean/innocent!”) Ironically, 水清無魚 (*shui qing wu yu* = water~clean-no~fish = bacteria/ graft-free places cannot nurture robust growth/activities).

by Diana Yue