

# 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 Buddhism

# 佛

Pronunciation: *fo* (Putonghua, 2<sup>nd</sup> tone), *fat* (Cantonese 6<sup>th</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: Buddha

佛 (*fo*, short for 佛陀 *fo tuo*) = Buddha. “佛陀” and “Buddha” are transliterations from the same Sanskrit (= 梵文 *fan wen* = Sanskrit-language) name.

Sakyamuni (= 釋迦牟尼 *xi jia mou ni*), founder of Buddhism, was born in 5th century B.C. At age-thirty he 成佛 (*cheng fo* = become~Buddha = attained Buddhahood). Upon death he entered Nirvana (= 涅槃 *nie pan*).

Buddhism preaches 慈悲 (*ci bei* = kindness~compassion/pity = mercy) and 覺 (*jue* = awakening = enlightenment). 佛教徒 (*fo jiao tu* = Buddha~religion-disciples = Buddhists) study 佛經 (*fo jing* = Buddhist scriptures/sutras) and 佛法 (*fo fa* = Buddhism~laws = Buddha’s teachings). 12 May 2008 is Buddha’s birthday (佛誕 *fo dan* = Buddha~birth).

by Diana Yue