

# 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

乘

Pronunciation: *cheng* (Putonghua, 2<sup>nd</sup> tone), *sing* (Cantonese 4<sup>th</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: carriage, ride

The noun 乘 means transport vehicle (boat/carriage). In ancient China, a 千乘之家 (*qian cheng zhi jia* = thousand-carriages~possessing~family/clan) was a powerful vassal lord.

In Buddhist parables, 筏 (*fa* = raft) and 乘 (*cheng* = vehicle) symbolize Buddhism carrying mankind to salvation. Buddhism has two divisions: 小乘 (*xiao cheng* = small-carriage-Buddhism = Hinayana Buddhism), like a small carriage, is about attaining enlightenment for oneself (getting on to the carriage alone). 大乘 (*da cheng* = big-carriage-Buddhism = Mahayana Buddhism), like a big carriage, is about attaining enlightenment and helping others to attain it.

The verb 乘 means ride. 乘車 (*cheng che*) = ride/take car. 乘虛而入 (*cheng xu er ri* = ride/seize-chance~empty~and~enter) means taking advantage of someone's weak moment to overpower him.

by Diana Yue