

# 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 earthquakes

川

Pronunciation: *chuan* (Putonghua, 1<sup>st</sup> tone), *chuen* (Cantonese 1<sup>st</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: river, short for Sichuan

川 (three vertical strokes symbolizing running water) = 河 (*he*) = river. 山川 (*shan chuan* = mountains~rivers) means geographic features. 川流不息 (*chuan liu bu xi* = river~flow~no~rest) describes continuous flow of people, traffic, commodities.

四川 (*si chuan* = four~rivers = Sichuan Province in western China), historically called 蜀 (*shu*), is a basin overrun by four rivers. Its capital is 成都 (*cheng du* = Chengdu). Its most famous wildlife is the 大熊貓 (*da xiong mao* = big~bear~cat = giant panda).

川 is short for 四川: 川菜 (*chuan cai* = Sichuan~vegi = Sichuan cuisine), 川劇 (*chuan ju* = Sichuan~drama = Sichuan opera), 川藏公路 (*chuan zang gong lu* = Sichuan~Xizang~public~road = Sichuan-Tibetan Highway).

by Diana Yue