

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 foreign countries

通

Pronunciation: *tong* (Putonghua, 1st tone), *tung* (Cantonese 1st tone)

Basic meaning: through, leading to, linking

通道 (*tong dao* = through~route) = linking route. 通知 (*tong zhi* = through~know) means tell/notify. 通訊 (*tong xun* = through~message) means communication, exchange/distribution of information. 溝通技巧 (*gou tong ji qiao* = ditch~through~skill~expertise) means communication skills, e.g. foreign language proficiency. 中國通 (*zhong guo tong* = China~know-through = China hand = sinophile).

Cities 通商 (*tong shang* = through~commerce = are linked by commercial activities), 通航 (*tong hang* = through~sail/fly = are linked by boats/planes). 通行證 (*tong xing zheng* = through~move/passage~ certificate) = 簽證 (*qian zheng* = sign~certificate) = visa.

四通八達 (*si tong ba da* = four~through~eight~reach) describes a very accessible locale. “八達通” (*ba da tong* = eight~reach~through) is the Chinese name for “Octopus Card”.

by Diana Yue