

# 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 tea

清

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

清 = 清潔 (*qing jie*) = clean/clear/pure: 清茶 (*qing cha* = plain~tea), 清湯 (*qing tang* = clear~soup). 清醒 (*qing xing* = clear~awoke = clear-headed) people have 清楚 (*qing chu* = clear~neat = unconfused) ideas. 清唱 (*qing chang* = pure~sing) means singing without instrumental accompaniment. 天朗氣清 (*tian lang qi qing* = sky~bright~air~clean) describes a fine day.

清 is opposite of 俗 (*su* = vulgar). 眉清目秀 (*mei qing mu xiu* = eyebrows~ sparsely-arched~eyes~elegant) makes a photogenic face. Fresh young girls look 清麗 (*qing li* = pure~lovely). 清談 (*qing tan* = pure~talk) means conversation avoiding heated topics.

清算 (*qing shuan* = clear~sum-up/calculate) means purge. 種族清洗 (*zhong zu qing xi* = species~race~clean~wash) is ethnic cleansing.

by Diana Yue