

# 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

紅

Pronunciation: *hong* (Putonghua, 2<sup>nd</sup> tone), *hung* (Cantonese 4<sup>th</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: red

紅 = red: 紅日 (*hong re* = red~sun), 紅酒 (*hong jiu* = red~wine). 臉紅 (*lian hong* = face-red) = blush. 紅樹林 (*hong shu lin* = red~tree-grove) = mangrove forests. 紅燈 (*hong deng* = red~light) = red/stop/danger signal.

Cash gifts/bribes are 紅包 (*hong bao* = red~packets). 紅白二事 (*hong bai er shi* = red~white~two~things/events) means weddings/birthdays and funerals. 紅 also symbolizes socialist/communist China: 紅軍 (*hong jun* = Red~Army), 紅衛兵 (*hong wei bing* = red~guard~soldier = Red Guards). 又紅又專 (*you hong you zhuan* = also~red~also~specialized) means politically correct and professionally sound.

看破紅塵 (*kan po hong chen* = see~break/through~red~dust, 紅塵: world's vanities) means disillusioned about life and desiring to become hermit/monk/nun.

by Diana Yue