

# 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 borrowing

Pronunciation: *ben* (Putonghua, 1<sup>st</sup> tone), *boon* (Cantonese 2<sup>nd</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: original, basis, foundation, capital, principal

本 = basis. 基本 (*ji ben* = foundation~basis) = fundamental, 本人 (*ben ren* = original~person) = himself/herself, in person. Capital is 資本 (*zi ben* = money~foundation), capitalism is 資本主義 (*zi ben zhu yi* = capital~main-meaning = capital-ideology).

Investors 打本 (*da ben* = mount/provide-capital) = supply/lend capital to businesses. Bank loans include 本金 (*ben jin* = basic-gold/money = principal) and 利息 (*li xi* = gain/earnings~interest = interest). 本錢 (*ben qian* = basic-money) in negotiations means bargaining power and job-seekers' personal talent/qualifications. Gamblers often lose 賭本 (*du ben* = betting~capital) then 翻本 (*fan ben* = return/turn-around~capital = win back losses).

Uncreative executives slavishly 按本子辦事 (*an ben zi ban shi* = follow-book~diminutive-handle-things = follow the book).

by Diana Yue